



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

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Education Reform Now Connecticut

February 18, 2021

Re: **H.B. No. 5681, An Act Concerning Municipal Opportunity Reimbursement and Educational Equity**

Chairmen Lopes and McGee, Vice Chairs Anwar and Smith, Ranking Members Cicarella and Polletta, and Members of the Joint Committee on Housing, thank you for the opportunity to provide **testimony in support of H.B. 5681**. This legislation, the MORE Act, draws an important link between educational opportunity and affordable housing access by using school construction dollars to incentivize municipalities to adopt inclusive zoning policies.

For decades, injustice in the state's housing policy has hampered its promise to provide a quality public education to all students. Many suburban communities with great schools have antiquated and classist anti-density policies (such as lot size requirements, moratoriums on new affordable units, and reductions in the supply of multi-family units) that promote segregation and deliberately keep many families out. These policies ensure ongoing opportunity gaps and perpetuate educational inequity.

There is a clear line between housing value and educational funding. While our housing system divides communities along economic and racial lines, our education funding system relies heavily on local property taxes. This funding can make a difference in class size, intervention for student needs including social workers, classroom aids or reading specialists, facilities, enrichment programs and materials like textbooks and technology. Stark differences in education resources can be seen in communities right next door to one another, year after year.

H.B. 5681 begins to address this cycle in a new way by making municipalities eligible for ten bonus points on their state reimbursement grants for school construction if they are designated as inclusive by the State Department of Education, the Department of Administrative Services, and the Department of Housing. Some of the reasonable but meaningful actions a community must take to achieve this distinction include permitting accessory dwellings, mixed-use, and multi-family developments, or demonstrating that new construction making up 1% of all housing stock in the community has been deemed affordable over the previous three years. As a state, we should be proud to reward local education systems that proactively pursue a more integrated public education community. They deserve our investment because they're working towards a better future.

Connecticut has long had one of the widest opportunity gaps in the nation, and it's past time to act. By passing this legislation, our state can make a long term impact, as well as demonstrate that Connecticut supports forward thinking communities that create opportunities for all working families and their children. I urge you to support H.B. 5461.